



IDAHO CONSERVATION LEAGUE

My name is John McCarthy and I'm the conservation director for the Idaho Conservation League.

Change is coming to the Snake River system and to Idaho.

Change may mean the elimination of salmon and steelhead. People can choose extinction, after thousands of years of evolution that produced runs of hundreds of thousands of fish. People have that awful power.

Change can mean recovery of Snake River salmon and steelhead, to regain the cornerstone of an ecological system critical to life in the Northwest.

The most significant change people can choose, to lead toward a sustainable salmon and steelhead fishery in the Snake-Salmon-Clearwater river system, is to bypass the four lower Snake River dams.

Dam removal is not a perfect, immediate cure for all problems. But it will avert the slide to extinction. It is the closest to a sure thing, ecologically and economically, to restore a complex lifeform to its past glory.

Some people are resistant to change. Some people want to continue the failed formulas of the past, to continue barging, hatcheries, and minor habitat improvements -- to continue down the tube toward extinction.

Some people point the finger at someone or something else causing the problems for fish. They claim it's birds or sea lions or Indians or commercial fishermen or weather patterns or the ocean. Some how these folks miss these factors never led to extinction in the past.

I believe the fish biologists who have studied the options presented before us who say, nothing but bypass of the dams will lead to recovery.

I believe anyone who supports some other half-measures or failed programs or new techno fixes is really saying, extinction is an OK risk or even a preferred option.

I don't believe people who claim "no one wants extinction" but then promote failed programs or bogus fixes. If someone wants extinction -- say it. Don't hide behind plans with no possibility of success.

Fish are resilient. Rivers are resilient. People are resilient.
Communities are resilient.

The question here today ought to be -- how do we make sure fish, rivers, people and communities bounce back and thrive after making the necessary changes so salmon and steelhead survive.

The sure route to survival for fish is a free flowing river.

Take out the dams and then come up with a plan for people and communities to also make changes, to survive and to thrive.

Sockeye salmon will effectively be extinct in Idaho's Salmon River at the end of this decade. We can choose to change that doomed direction, or we can let our resistance to change speak for eternity.